Traditionally, rural settlements were associated with primary activities like agriculture. In rural settlement the most basic sitting factors can be seen clearly at work. This is because permanent villages, like the semi-permanent settlements of shifting cultivators or nomads, or the temporary camps of hunters and gatherers, from which they evolved, have the same basic requirements of food, water, shelter and protection. As man has developed more and more sophisticated techniques of obtaining a living, he has been able to depend more and more on a single place to provide his livelihood, but the basic requirements must be present. If these needs are provided, other factors such as planning can come into play and affect the siting of settlement.

In most countries the pattern of rural settlement that we see today is the result of a series of adjustments to the environment which have been going on for centuries. In some countries, however, either as part of a land reform scheme or because the pressure of population in the existing settled areas is becoming too great, new villages and rural settlements are being established today.

The physical factors are not alone sufficient to explain the patterns of rural settlements. Economic factors like markets, village cart-tracts, footpaths, roads and railways have also mattered to self-sufficient village communities. In the light of historical analysis of the growth of settlements, various geographical factors and their regional effects, four systems of rural settlements are recognized, viz, a) Indigenous system in the plains, b) Tribal system in the hills, c) Immigrant system and d) Estate latifundium system. In the highly dissected plateau of Kashi and Jaintia hills, geological, topographical and micro-climatic conditions have exerted their influence on the distribution and sitting of settlements besides cultural and historical factors. The complexity of structure, terrain, and drainage has caused relatively uneven distribution of settlements. The rugged areas of the plateau possess more uneven or irregular distribution of settlements. While the relatively flat area (The central part of Khasi hills and northern part of Jaintia hills), shows more or less even distribution of settlements. In the more dissected and uneven areas settlement grew only on small plains adjacent to river basins, while the scarps, steep slopes, divides and ridges remained forest covered. In the rugged areas it is seen, isolated hamlet or isolated homestead associated with isolated patchy agricultural land.

On the other hand, in the relatively flat plains and tablelands, Semi-Compact fragmented and dispersed settlements are seen. Though a number of roadside linear settlements have been evolved through
time along the national Highway. The hilly and highly dissected area (the Western part) of the plateau is dotted with widely spaced small villages and isolated hamlet. The eastern part of the plateau has relatively gentle slope than the Southern scarp. A large number of large size settlements with permanent agricultural land along the river valleys as well as along the National and State highways are a marked characteristic of this part of the plateau.

### 2.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS:

Rural settlements have a much longer history of development than urban settlements, and so their human characteristics have a much deeper foundation. The characteristics include demography, way of life, intellectual outlook, environmental perception, aspects of behaviours, and sociological interaction are the direct result of man's long and involved relationship with his surrounding and they represent the most natural and human conditions.

**Size of the Community:**

The village communities are smaller in area than the urban communities. As the village communities are small, the population is also low.

**Density of Population:**

As the density of population is low, the people have intimate relationships and face-to-face contacts with each other. In a village, everyone knows everyone. Rural area is sparsely populated because many people leaves rural areas and settles in the urban areas for more facilities.

**The primacy of Agriculture:**

Agriculture is the fundamental occupation of the rural people and forms the basis of the rural economy. A farmer has to perform various agricultural activities for which he needs the cooperation of other members. Usually, these members are from his family. Thus, the members of the entire family share agricultural activities. That is the reason why Lowry Nelson has mentioned that farming is a family enterprise.

**Close Contact with Nature**

The rural people are in close contact with nature as most of their daily activities revolve around the natural environment. This is the reason why a ruralite is more influenced by nature than an urbanite. The villagers consider land as their real mother as they depend on it for their food, clothing, and shelter.

**Homogeneity:**

The village communities are homogenous in nature. Most of their inhabitants are connected with agriculture and its allied occupations, though there are people belonging to different castes, religions, and classes.
These society has homogeneity in its profession that is their only source of earning is agriculture and this is transmitted from generation to generation.

There is homogeneity in dress, language and customs. It means all these remain same because their culture is same, they belong to the same area.

**Social Stratification:**
In rural society, social stratification is a traditional characteristic, based on caste. The rural society is divided into various strata on the basis of caste.

**Social Interaction:**
The frequency of social interaction in rural areas is comparatively lower than in urban areas. However, the interaction level possesses more stability and continuity. The relationships and interactions in the primary groups are intimate. The family fulfils the needs of the members and exercises control over them. It is the family, which introduces the members to the customs, traditions and culture of the society. Due to limited contacts, they do not develop individuality and their viewpoint towards the outside world is very narrow, which makes them oppose any kind of violent change. In Rural society there are more formal groups than urban society.

**Slow Means of Communication**
Rural areas have very slow rate of change because of lack of education and modern technology. The exposures to the outer world is limited. These settlements have got simple culture transmitted from generation to generation. Rural areas have got informal social life that is they spent their life in a simple way.

**Social Mobility:**
In rural areas, mobility is rigid as all the occupations are based on caste. Shifting from one occupation to another is difficult as caste is determined by birth. Thus, caste hierarchy determines the social status of the rural people.

**Social Solidarity:**
The degree of social solidarity is greater in villages as compared to urban areas. Common experience, purposes, customs, and traditions form the basis of unity in the villages. The point is debatable as there is much politics going on in villages.

**Joint Family System:**
Another characteristic feature of rural society is the joint family system. The family controls the behaviour of the individuals. Generally, the father is the head of the family and is also responsible for maintaining the discipline among members. He manages the affairs of the family.
**Strong Bonding**

Rural communities have got strong relationships and interactions of the people. It means that they help each other in distress and shares the happiness.

**Less pollution**

In such areas there is less rate of pollution because there are no factories and mills and the number of automobiles is less. Nature is more important to them.

There are also some other specific nature and character of rural settlements are as follows.

In general, the essential characteristics of the rural way of life are marked by **conservatism, stability and introversion**. Compared with other settlements, rural settlement tends to be **slower, calmer, quieter, and less stressful**. Such characteristics can be seen in many economic, sociological, and geographical aspects. In country districts, people tend to be healthier and to live longer. They are **less mobile** (Occupationally and spatially) more superstitious and traditional, more introvert and suspicious of strangers, and more wary of change and progress. They tend to have closer horizons and a narrower view of world affairs.

Rural settlement is **purely residential**, and shops are few and far between the villagers getting their supplies at the periodical, weekly or biweekly markets (hats or pants) or the fair (mela) to which people flock in from the neighborhood. In this respect rural India is not unlike mediaeval England, where nearly all selling and buying took place at weekly markets or annual fairs. We see that in India, as in all countries, society is arranged in strata, which are based upon differences of social or political importance, or of occupation.

Most of the rural settlements of the world are stable and permanent. The rural are dominated by open countryside extensive land uses relatively low population densities and simple mode of life dominates the rural areas. It is often supposed as opposite to urban. Most of the world settlements are rural.